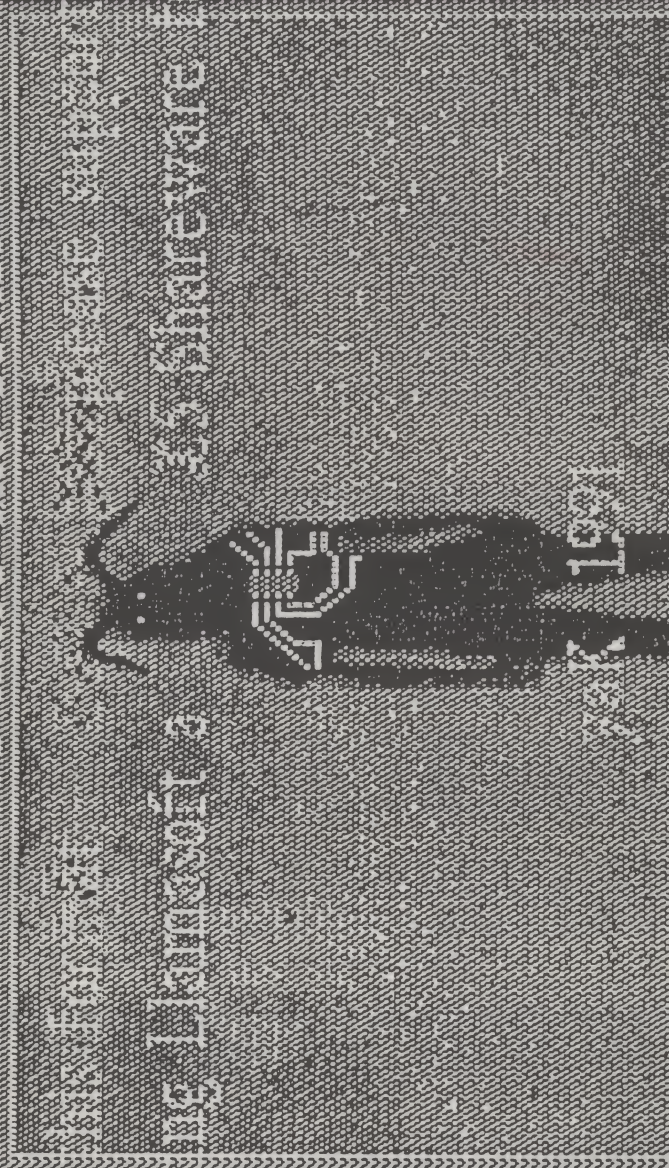


off Mark
↓

This program is Shareware. If you enjoy this game
and would like to see more and better stuff from
me in the future, please support me
by paying Llamasoft a \$5 shareware fee.



YAK 1991

Send to: Llamasoft, 49 Mount Pleasant, Tadley,
Hants RG26 6HN. All who do will receive a varjak
llama poster, newsletter and copy of Llamas Attack!

WHILE STOCKS LAST!! PLEASE SEND IN3 GAF CURRENCY!! CHEERS YAK

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST...

1: LLAMA NEWS

Greetings, chipheads! We haven't done a newsletter for a while, and to coincide with the release of LLAMATRON, and just to let everyone know how it's hanging with us, and as usual to rave on about various bits of ware, here I am again.....

You have probably noticed that we're not advertising or going to shows just recently. This doesn't mean we've gone bust or I've run out of game ideas or anything: far from it. It's just that as the nature of the games market has changed, so we have had to metamorphose in order to remain viable. To publish a game effectively is no longer really practical for a small outfit like ourselves. The simple act of putting out good games at a good price isn't enough to ensure that distributors will buy your games. (We tried this with ANDES ATTACK and GRIDRUNNER; both games cost under a tenner and received largely excellent reviews (GRIDRUNNER won the award for best budget game of '89) - but very few got into the shops). You need to spend thousands on advertising alone to launch a game properly. Consequently, we're now operating largely as a development house, working in league with a larger publisher. This is done on a game-by-game basis; I'm not committed long-term to any one publisher, but as long as I get a good deal with whoever I'm working with I don't move around.

Of course I don't like this state of affairs as much as the way things were back in the C64 days, where I could be as weird as I liked and we could publish anything we wanted, but that's how it is, and it's a case of adapt or be destroyed, as so many of our contemporaries have been. I've always thought that the market would probably end up like this (see old NOTBs and YAK stuff from a few years ago), and to a certain extent we have to compromise and play by the rules in order to remain part of the scene. Despite that, I don't think we've come off too badly; we have far fewer overheads than before; I get some pretty interesting work to do; I still get to do my own designs in my own place; I don't have to get up at nine (or quit at five!) or wear a suit.

And there is a way to do weird stuff and ensure its distribution. Some of you will know what I'm on about - it's why you have this newsletter. More on this later.

So I'm still here, still got all those itching trigger fingers in mind and a blast on the drawing board, haven't burned out, haven't gone crazy (yet). Almost ten years on, that ain't so bad. And there's definitely a rosy glow on the horizon.

2. NEW HARDWARE IN MY LIFE

I have a whole bunch of new hardware in my life at the moment. I have a big black metal prototype console beastie about which I can tell you precisely zip, being stitched up tight by non-disclosure agreements signed in virgins' blood at the full moon, you know the kind of thing, promising total bankruptcy and removal of certain pink dangly parts with extreme prejudice and blunt household implements if transgressed. Suffice to say that I'm very impressed and I'm having a lot of fun, and I'm cooking up a killer game for ye sometime soon.

One item of new hardware I can tell you about - the TT! I finally got a TT, and it's excellent! GEM has been greatly improved; windows snick into place quickly and smoothly, the standard desktop is 640x480x16 colours, which means plenty of room for drive icons and windows; there's a nice fast 50M hard

drive built-in and it's FAST: you should see it run Hendy the Mad Mathemagician's Mandy generator (the Handy Hendy Bendy Mandy). The 32-MHz 68030 really kicks silicon ass. Quite a lot of ST software runs on the machine too: DevpackDeveloper, for example, Deluxe Paint, TRIP-a-TRON (deep joy! You can have a bunch of symmetry on and the whole thing still stays fast and responsive! And you should see the starfs and SillyScope). All work fine, and so do GRIDRUNNER and ANDES ATTACK. The games are great - totally smooth throughout, no slowdown no matter how much stuff you get on screen. 3D stuff is silky-smooth (I tried Starglider II). At the moment I have no TT-specific stuff - I will be looking forward to some good 3D stuff which takes advantage of the 68882 FPU, and some stuff to use the 320x480 256-colour screen mode.

I really love the TT. It does away with all the little niggles of the ST but remains comfortably familiar so you don't feel lost when you make the change. I was impressed that I could just plug my old ST hard drive into the TT port, install new drive icons, and have access to all my ST stuff straight away. And it's nice to have a Desktop big enough to contain all those icons (I'm up to Drive "I" now would you believe). GEM is so much better too. I look forward to the new wave of TT software - you could write some dynamite games on this thing, but I suspect it'll be a while before the TT becomes a games machine - and I devoutly hope and pray that someone out there is working on a MAC II emulator. I've always wanted a MAC II.....

3: THE SHAREWARE EXPERIMENT

For a while now it has really peed me off that it's so hard to release a good game these days. All a lot of publishers seem to want is conventional stuff or licenses. If a game isn't some hyped blockbuster that takes two years to play, or it doesn't look like R-Type, a lot of publishers don't want to know. If you try to sell a game as budget then people think it must be crap because it doesn't cost twenty quid.

Anyway, after I finished DEFENDER II for ARC and before I got going on this here console work, I had a little time to spare, so I started writing a game. Now you know I love those WILLIAMS games, and there hasn't been a decent version of ROBOTRON since Paul Holmes' old Spectrum game, so I thought, why not do meself a tasty ROBOTRON? Better still, why not just do all sorts of new stuff too, and really go to town? So I dug out the ST.....

Thus was born LLAMATRON. In the LLAMASOFT tradition (and partly as a reaction against the last couple of games which, although groovy games, have been done on a strictly no-beasties basis for ARC) you control a laser-spitting llama. You have to rescue tiny sheep, llamas, goats and camels from Grunts, Fire Hydrant Generators, Screaming Mandelbrot Sets, Sheepipedes, giant marauding toilet bowls, Coke cans, mutant TVs, Lickers, enraged cutlery, mechanoid Murderers (they run about killing your beasties, and then try to kill you!), lasers, homing goat missiles, and mucho weird stuff. All this to the accompaniment of some >>wicked<< sampled FX, over 100 levels, with the option of simultaneous 2-player team mode (you and a camelfriend against the creeps) or Droid mode (a computer-controlled ally which is without doubt the smartest bolt-on you ever had - play a game with it and see how often it saves your ass).

<I am boiling mad at this point. Anyone using a TT and First Word Plus - don't try and load the spelling dictionary. A two-hour edit down the pan. Two little bombs and thankyou and goodnight. I shouldn't have worried anyway - my spelling ain't that bad. And my Mum used to be a proof reader. Aaaargh>>

Anyway, after I'd finished this game I wondered what to do with it. Sure, I could probably sell it to some budget company and maybe sell a couple of thou, but I wanted to get a better distribution than that. So, as an experiment, I decided to put the game out as SHAREWARE.

Provided that all parties involved are honest, SHAREWARE is a near-perfect means of software distribution. You write a game and when time comes to put it out, you don't have to spend thousands on flashy packaging, advertising and duplication - you just send a copy off to all the PD libraries you can think of. The PD libraries are happy because they make money by cataloguing and duplicating all this stuff. The users are happy, because they get to try the full finished version of the game for little more than the price of the disk. Users are only obliged to pay if they actually think the software deserves the asking price - so no-one is ever disappointed (as when having spent twenty quid on some hyped game only to find that it's dross). Pirates and hackers become redundant, because you actually want people to spread the game around- they'd be doing you a favour. Good SHAREWARE will distribute and export itself, being passed around to other gamers and PD libraries, uploaded onto BBSes, whatever; and the 'shelf-life' of a game in SHAREWARE is much longer than in a shop - the game could still be floating around online and in PD catalogues years later. There is no editorial control, you're not having to satisfy some commercially-minded bossman who wants to play only by the established rules - so you can be as weird as you like. Good software will tend to do well and survive, spreading out into the datasphere; bad stuff just won't get spread, and will fail. The system is completely non-exclusive; anyone who feels that they have something good can do the business for the price of a pile of KAOs, a bunch of stamps and a packet of plain brown envelopes.

Ideal though this system is, it does depend on the honesty of those who use it. I don't think it'll ever replace commercial software as a way of making a living, because there will always be people content to take the software and not bother paying the registration fee. I would love to be proved wrong, as the SHAREWARE method would provide such an amazingly varied and diverse universe of software and encourage anyone with good ideas to get in there and have a go, and life would be much more interesting than it is with the megacorps. Unfortunately PD has the reputation of being full of sub-commercial stuff that's clunky and created by people who weren't good enough to make the commercial grade. True, there is some stuff like that, but there are some real gems too if you're selective about what you get. And the more people who support SHAREWARE by playing the game fairly, the more likely programmers are to expend time and effort to make quality stuff.

We're encouraging people to register by giving them a copy of ANDES ATTACK and this newsletter for their five quid registration fee. Two good games for a fiver can't be bad, can it? If you're one of those people who think that PD and SHAREWARE is all rubbish, I challenge you to get hold of a copy of LLAMATRON and compare it with your average twenty quid blaster. If you liked the arcade game ROBOTRON, then you are in for a great time - get hold of LLAMATRON immediately. LLAMATRON isn't a clone of ROBOTRON - it's much better!

Check it out.....

(And a big hairy THANXX to those people who have registered already!)

4: STATE OF PLAY

It's been quite a weird journey, getting this far. We started LLAMASOFT nearly ten years ago in 1982, on the basis of some ZX81 stuff and one particular game

on the then new-fangled VIC-20. Talk about being in the right place at the right time: I went from being on the dole and getting over a serious illness to being in demand, known, flown out to the States, all that stuff, in a couple of years. It was a strange time.

Things have changed since then - the computer games market has become an 'industry', consequently a lot more of a ratrace. Large companies discovered (a) that there was a lot of money to be made in this game and (b) film licences. Creativity has withered; no more far-out stuff like 'NECROMANCER' on the ATARI 800 (go on, who's old enough to remember that?), 'SPACE DUST' on the C64 (the nearest thing to a TRIP-a-TRON game I ever saw) or even 'MIND WALKER' on the AMIGA when it first came out. Now it's DUNGEON MASTER, R-TYPE, ROBOCOP or TETRIS (or some variation upon the theme) and that's all you get.

What happened to originality? To MARBLE MADNESS, I ROBOT, TAC-SCAN, QUASAR, TEMPEST, JOUST? Where are Eugene Jarvis and the guy who wrote STAR RAIDERS? Isn't it about time they came back to save the Universe from endless iterations of the same old thing with new graphics and sounds?

Mind you, a lot of good things have happened since those VIC-20 days. Now I have megabytes of RAM where once I had a single pitiful and quivering K. Fiddling about with the playback level on a crappy old tape deck, watching the flickering bands of ZX loading on a clapped-out old TV in 1981 are replaced ten years later by the quiet, assured hum of the fans on 60M of online hard disk storage. Gone are the days of '16 colour' systems and 'attribute clash'. The future promises amazing things: VIRTUAL REALITY is going to change everything (and if you think that VR is all a bit clunky and unrealistic as the moment, think again about how quickly things change in this technology - and remember those chunky Lego-brick pixels on your ZX81 were only ten years ago).

My biggest success has also been my biggest disappointment - TRIP-a-TRON and its precursors. My biggest success, because I think that in these programs I really did find something new, some form of computer entertainment that is purely creative and a million miles away from the usual stuff with the spaceships and Smart Bombs. Disappointment, because although I desperately wanted to develop the idea further (I still do) all any of the large publishers seem to want is more spaceships and Smart Bombs (or more likely dungeons and dwarves these days). It was very disappointing to find out that a certain prestigious publishing company, despite the hip stance they used to proclaim on all their packaging (We are a group of Electronic Artists blah blah) apparently wouldn't know a genuine electronic artform if it leapt up and bit them on the bum. Never mind - there's plenty of time yet; don't think you've seen my last long word on that particular theme just yet....

It's been a huge amount of fun writing all those games; when I first learned 6502 at sixth-form in order to write games on the COMMODORE PET for the college chipheads, I never imagined that what was at the time a strange and

obscure hobby would lead to a viable job, some small amount of fame (or notoriety), going to the States, Peru, Egypt, and having a damn fine time! It's hard work too, and it can get kind of lonely, as I don't go into any kind of workplace, just sit here with Denis the Siamese cat staring into Devpac all day (let you into a secret: it's actually Denis the Siamese cat who does all the programming, honest); but it's satisfying, especially when you complete a game and then you see people getting addicted to it! I miss going to computer shows as an exhibitor; I used to enjoy going along, meeting all the weirdos who play my games, doing those big lightsynth demos, nipping off down to the LASERIUM after

the show on a Saturday night, demonstrating all the new stuff, playing people at doubles, and generally making contact. Mind you, shows have changed now; it's largely impersonal, either loads of stands selling disks and bits of software cheap, or, when one of the software megacorps puts in an appearance you just get a huge edifice dotted with monitors (and maybe the odd Ferrari) running the latest licences, manned by Suits and maybe Bimbos. The programmers are largely still chained to their PDSses in a dungeon somewhere so there's no point of contact any more between the creators and the users, which I think is a sad state of affairs.

Anyway, things change and there's no point in sitting around thinking about the way things were a few billion clock cycles ago. You'll still see me at shows (quite possibly giving away copies of LLAMATRON with a mad gleam in my eye). Things are different, but it's still looking good. On the Phillips monitor the new game system is doing unspeakable things with a Mandelbrot image and a bunch of sine waves while a 3D Colourspace-algorithm-thingie with real objects instead of pixels swoops about and proves that yes, my object prioritising code is fine and funky. There's good, interesting, fun work to be done now, and the prospect of a wicked, psychedelic, 50Hz megablast to create over the next few months. I haven't run out of tea bags, the cat and the sheep are well, it's nearly summer - and I've got a TT!

5: TURN ONS

LEMMINGS: Proof positive that there is still hope for those who prefer original games. LEMMINGS is just the best variation on the platform/puzzle theme, and I love the way that instead of a single player you have to control a whole herd. Okay, so it's been well hyped by now with all the mags going crazy about it, but this time it's all true and you really should run, gibbering and screaming insanely, out to your local emporium and invest.

THUNDERSTRIKE: Only if you have a reasonable PC and VGA though. (It's just fine on my 286/12). TS is a 3D version of DEFENDER. The game looks quite a lot like VIRUS, but it's a bit easier to get the hang of. What makes the game is the degree of control you have (when you're accomplished you can really fling that ship around and kick some ass) and the excellent tracking-camera viewpoint. Saw it on an ST and it was only a pale and slow shadow of the glorious PC version - you get used to a good VGA game, it spoils you for anything else!

INSPIRAL CARPETS: Definitely my fave contemporary band at the moment. The INSPIRALS are prolific and imaginative, running the gamut from yer Manchester sound through dance mixes right up to blistering heavy blasting-music. Their first album 'LIFE' last year promised great things, and their new album 'THE BEAST INSIDE' definitely fulfils that promise (check out 'GRIP', 'NIAGARA', and especially 'FURTHER AWAY', which is just the best track

I have heard for years - it evokes early FLOYD classics like SET THE CONTROLS and SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS in places, but it's much heavier, and builds up into an awesome brain-exploding mad rave boogiemania - buy the album and play 'FURTHER AWAY' as loudly as your audio hardware can stand. If you have thin walls and unsympathetic neighbours - move. It's worth it. Not only are the INSPIRALS an excellent band, they also have a big thing about cows. What more can I say, except see you at the concert in ALLY PALLY in June....

VIRTUAL REALITY: I've had a few goes on some of the VR kit and it's just as amazing as everyone says it is. The Virtuality system, although not as all-out funky as the VPL stuff, has the huge advantage of being available in arcades

right now. Now if Virtuality were to put some of their stuff into that wild SEGA R-360 powered gimbal doobrie, that would be seriously kickin'.....

THE TT: It's just like the first time you get a hard disk drive - once you get used to it you never want to go back to the old ways. Very, very tasty.

THE LYNX: Has emerged victorious as the best handheld game system. GAME BOY is all right but looking at that tiny somewhat blurred mono screen is like going back to a Spectrum after you've been using an Amiga, compared to LYNX's full-colour arcade style graphics. SEGA's GAME GEAR has a nice screen, but it's basically only about as powerful as the old Master System. LYNX's dedicated graphics hardware gives it power like most arcade games; there are a lot of excellent games being developed, both by EPYX and third party developers; and soon you'll have the new micro-LYNX, which runs all the same stuff but is a lot more pocketable than its predecessor. That such a machine is available for under a hundred quid is truly amazing, and now it's not so expensive there's no excuse for not having one. My fave games at the moment: KLAX (wicked samples!), SLIME WORLD (platform/exploration/zap game which looks like it's set in the nostrils of someone with a really disgusting cold); ZARLOR MERCENARY (out-and-out vertically-scrolling brainless zapping mayhem) and RAMPAGE (be a giant lizard, smash up buildings and EAT PEOPLE). And I hear that they're converting LEMMINGS onto the LYNX. Deep joy!.....

(Oh yeah. While on the subject of LYNX, you may have seen that there is a game called GRIDRUNNER being developed in the States now. Don't rush out and buy it expecting GRIDRUNNER, because it's a completely different game. The guys developing it thought of the name themselves, not knowing that it means something completely different here. I think they are going to change the name, but in case they don't, you have been warned).

6: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO KONIX?

Last time I wrote one of these, I was raving on about the KONIX console, which I was working on at the time. The idea of the console was brilliant, the hardware was pretty good, so what went wrong? KONIX were late finishing off the hardware, spectacularly failed to appear at the PC Show, which was supposed to be the grand launch of the new beastie (they eventually did arrive but they were just too late: cred blown), and then they ran out of money. COMMODORE distributor ADD-ON moved in to try and pick up the pieces; I went down to see them in January '90 and they swore blind that the system would yet emerge, but that was the last I heard. I and a whole bunch of other KONIX developers had wasted months of work, were a few thousand quid poorer and pretty peed off. I went back to the ST and AMIGA.

This time it's a much better deal all round. The manufacturer is a large multinational company, and I've got the development kit without having to open my wallet, and the hardware's better.

Incidentally, the other thing I raved about, the PARSEC graphics board, is also kaput, ELMTECH having gone bust. Ah well, you can't get it right all of the time; I was right about the C64 and the ST and AMIGA though wasn't I?

7: RECENT YAKLY CONSTRUCTIONS

Since the last newsletter I've written a couple of games; the idea I believe I referred to in the last ish as ATOMIC TADPOLES vs. SAVAGE MUTANT WEIRDOES FROM BASINGSTOKE metamorphosed into the more spaceship-and-alien PHOTON STORM, released by ARC last year; following that I took great pleasure in doing

DEFENDER II, which was a big opportunity for me to pay homage to one of my all-time fave arcade games. Eventually I ended up doing three games in one, with complete versions of DEFENDER and STARGATE plus my extrapolation of the theme DEFENDER II. If you're into DEFENDER you'll love these games. Wicked sample sonix throughout, mouse control which provides instant responsiveness, lots of levels and some fine weapons, notably the Smart Laser and the Chicken.

Both those games were released on ARC, and are available from ATARI if you can't get hold of them anywhere else. The most recent game I have already mentioned, LLAMATRON; this is available as SHAREWARE. For the completists amongst you, look out for a little file floating about called YAK.PR6; it is a close copy of the original VIC-20 GRIDRUNNER, complete with extra lives, eight levels (difficulty increases if you get round it), proper scoring (but alas no sound effects) - and it's written in 3.5K, just like the original (check it by using SHOW INFO!). This was done as a demo for a coders' convention in Holland last Christmas, which I was unable to attend as I was going downhill fast at LA PLAONE at the time.....

8: JUEGO TERMINADO.

That's about it for this time; it's almost pub-time here in Woolly Welsh Wales. If I get a good response from the SHAREWARE release of LLAMATRON, I will release more stuff this way. There may be an AMIGA version of LLAMATRON when I don't have to work so hard on the new beast (I'm going like ten at the moment building up a good solid set of core routines and seeing what sort of tricks you can get up to with the video chip). I apologise for not giving out any details at all about my current work, but those non-disclosure agreements lurk, and I have no wish to do anything to endanger the pink dangly bits. I dare say that details will emerge in the games magazines in the fullness of time.

I hope everyone enjoys LLAMATRON (everyone with an ST, that is) and that you find it easier to get hold of than a lot of recent LLAMASOFT releases. Do give us some kind of feedback, even if you only write to tell us why you don't think it's worth the money - but I'm confident it won't come to that, indeed I think you'll find the game has a totally wicked hook!

Watch out for me at shows. I'm the big hairy thing with the independently-rotatable eyeballs and the Peruvian jumper. Talk to me. I'm really quite friendly!

-- Y a K 1991